

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A modified human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1) gp41 polypeptide, ~~comprising:~~ comprising a full-length sequence selected from the group consisting of the sequences set forth in SEQ ID NOs: 8 and 17-21.  
~~an immunodominant region (IDR) of gp41,~~  
~~a N helix region of gp41,~~  
~~a C helix region of gp41, and~~  
~~a connecting loop comprising a hydrophilic synthetic linker between the N- and C helices, the linker replacing amino acids 599-610 of gp41, the numbering scheme being based upon the prototypic isolate HIV-1 HxB2,~~  
~~wherein the linker is configured to:~~  
~~maintain a native conformation of an interaction between the N- and C helices, and~~  
~~have a hydrophilicity that provides a soluble and stable trimeric form to said modified polypeptide.~~

2-21. (Canceled)

22. (Currently Amended) An immunogenic composition containing as an active ingredient a modified polypeptide as defined in claim 1.

23. (Canceled)

24. (New) A modified human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1) gp41 polypeptide, comprising amino acid residues 1-108 of SEQ ID NO: 17.

25. (New) An immunogenic composition containing as an active ingredient a modified polypeptide as defined in claim 24.

26. (New) A modified human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1) gp41 polypeptide, comprising the sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO:1, wherein:
- amino acids 54–78 are replaced by a linker consisting of the sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO:2; and
- amino acids 126–139 are deleted.
27. (New) An immunogenic composition containing as an active ingredient a modified polypeptide as defined in claim 26.